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TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM IV
SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER CALLS FOR CALM, SETS UP OBSERVATION COMMITTEES

REF: 10 ABIDJAN 13

CLASSIFIED BY: Tanya Salseth, Political Officer, DoS; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On January 12, Prime Minister Guillaume Soro publicly declared that the current Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) scandal has not jeopardized the integrity of the voters' list. However, to ensure that there are no doubts about the integrity of the list, the four other technical structures involved in the identification and voter registration process (SAGEM, ONI, INS, CNSI) have been instructed by the PM's office to send representatives to 70 observation committees that will oversee the adding and subtracting of names from the provisional list. END SUMMARY

¶2. (SBU) On January 12, Prime Minister Soro held a meeting with all of the technical structures involved in the identification and voter registration process (SAGEM, ONI, INS, CNSI, CEI) to discuss the way forward following allegations of fraud on the part of CEI President Robert Mambe (reftel). SRSG Choi, OPA Facilitator Boureima Badini, and the press were also present. The PM called for calm and explained that although the CEI had acted on its own accord in running additional name checks on the provisional voters' list, the 429,000 names in question had not been added to nor subtracted from the initial list of 1.033 million "unverified" names. PM Soro reaffirmed that the provisional voters' list, which contains some 5.3 million names in total, had not been permanently altered. In order to allay concerns over the integrity of the list, Soro also said his office is instructing all five technical structures involved in the electoral process to each send one representative to 70 local observation committees, which will be set up in the coordination centers. These new five-person observation committees will monitor the modification of the provisional voters' list - a step that had initially been the sole responsibility of the CEI.

¶3. (C) Poloff spoke with SAGEM's head representative Fabien Rouaud on January 12. He confirmed that SAGEM had already deployed its 70 agents to the field to monitor the "scrubbing" of the provisional voters' list, and SAGEM was the first and only structure to have its agents already in place. Rouaud also told Poloff that it would be "impossible" for the CEI to tamper with the database used to produce the provisional list, as only SAGEM has access to it. The CEI was using an electronic copy of information generated from the SAGEM database and not the database itself. The initial SAGEM contract stipulated that the CEI would make the necessary changes to this electronic copy and then return the copy to SAGEM to produce the final voters' list. Rouaud said that, due to the recent allegations of fraud, the "scrubbing" of the list will now be done under the oversight of the 70 observation committees. SAGEM will be responsible for inputting and deleting names from the list.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: Although the PM's remarks might reassure Ivoirians that the voters' list has not been compromised, they may not be enough to placate President's Gbagbo's party, which appears incensed over the CEI's recent actions. For example, Poloff heard from UN sources that Gbagbo is considering raising this issue with the Permanent Consultative Framework. Many longtime observers of the electoral process believe that the FPI's overreaction is yet another tactic to stall elections. (Indeed, SRSG Choi told Ambassador last week that Gbagbo is no longer confident of winning; Mambe's actions come at a particularly opportune time.) That said, the PM reiterated that the period for filing challenges to the provisional electoral list officially ended on January 9. There is some question about whether this will hold, as Gbagbo has been actively pushing to extend the cutoff date. It also remains to be seen how much more the set-up of these new observation committees will delay the printing of the final voters' list, and with it, the presidential election. END COMMENT

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